

**"THE RETURN OF THE EXCLUDED"**  
**FEMINIST AND POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES ON**  
**WESTERN MODERNITY**

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**ABSTRACT** In political, scholarly and cultural discussions in the 'Global North', ideas of freedom, democracy and human rights were considered universal and legitimated for political and military interventions mostly in non-Western countries. Debates about the universality of the right to intervene are discussed in the frame of universality versus particularity. Whereas universalists defend their arguments in the name of modernity, their challengers opposed to these kinds of universal assumptions refer to the importance of particularism and relativism; yet, both groups consider modernity as their main point of reference. To overcome this stalled discussion, I look at modernity through the deconstruction of epistemic dichotomies and hierarchies in order to open up a space for critical reflection on the concept itself. Contextualizing my reflections on modernity in the rich literature by scholars who challenge the dominant Western concept of modernity, I demonstrate that Western knowledge is not universal in an epistemic sense. Rather, it can be considered as a contentious concept with problematic assumptions about an epistemically neutral subject, adopting a universalistic perspective while erasing the meaning of geopolitical location (Grosfoguel 2011). Arguing against this idea of an 'assertive universality', the metaphor of 'travelling theories,' as proposed by Edward Said and Clifford Geertz, helps to reflect upon the local, social and individual positioning of knowledge. The focus of this contribution is the utilisation of feminist and postcolonial perspectives to contribute to the deconstruction of modernity as a homogenous monolithic bloc. Considering the frame itself, I question the hidden, not explicated assumptions in the production of Western knowledge. Arguing that knowledge production is not a question of geography but of epistemology, I deconstruct the modern project from the inside in order to overcome the epistemic dichotomy of modernity itself. The implications of this analysis for us as social scientists and researchers will be discussed at the end of the paper.

**ABSTRACT** (German) Dieser Beitrag beschäftigt sich mit der Frage, wie die Europäische Moderne zu einem hegemonialen Wissenssystem mit universalem Anspruch werden konnte. Die Freilegung der binären Konstruktionslogik der Moderne wird anhand der Arbeiten von Sandra Harding vorgenommen, um auf jene Ein- und Ausschlussprozesse in den 'imaginaries of modernity' zu verweisen, welche dem Konzept der Europäischen Moderne einen universellen Anspruch verleihen. Basierend auf den Arbeiten von Judith Butler und Walter D. Mignolo wird Universalität als Schlüsselbegriff der Moderne herausgearbeitet und auf ihre hegemonialen Auswirkungen auf Wissensproduktionen befragt. Die Dekonstruktion moderner, hegemonial gewordener Epistemologien wird aus einer feministischen und einer post\_kolonialen Perspektive vorgenommen, da sie die Europäische Moderne aus der Perspektive der Ausgeschlossenen einer kritischen Analyse unterziehen und jenseits der binären Konstruktionslogik konzeptualisieren. Am Ende des Beitrags wird das Konzept des 'Abstands' und des 'Dazwischens', wie es von Francois Jullien entworfen wurde, als ein Vorstellungsraum beschrieben, in dem mit Fragen von Ein- und Ausschlüssen in Wissensproduktionen nicht hegemonial, sondern dialogisch und reflektierend umgegangen werden kann.

**Keywords:** modernity, universalism, particularism, knowledge, hegemony

### **Points of departure**

In discussing an essay of Nikita Dhawan about women's rights in a globalized world with colleagues from the Gender Council at the University of Salzburg the debate became very heated and controversial. The question 'can women's rights claim universality' became the center of our discussion. Two opposite groups emerged in the course of the arguments: the universalistic and the particularistic approach.

For the defenders of the universalistic approach human rights are seen as values and norms of Modernity, deriving from European Enlightenment. For them all human beings possess these intrinsic and inalienable rights. In arguing for a general superiority of the West in contrast to non-western societies, this group defends political interventions in the name of development, democracy and human/women rights. In the line of their arguments the 'Others' were characterized as backward, pre-modern and captured in tradition and religion. And, so, the arguments assert, these 'cultures' need Western knowledge for societal progress and political development. This "categorization of non-Western values and norms as being "cultural" or "non-

modern” is accompanied by the promise that they can progress towards modernity by overcoming the particular embracing the universal” (Cowell, 2014, p. 265).

The group defending Particularism considered the context as important and took a more relativistic perspective. They draw their arguments on the recognition of culture and different cultural practices. They challenge the idea of moral superiority of the West, pointing out how the imperialist tendencies of European norms legitimized interventions, colonialism and imperialism. Asserting the primacy of particular over universal values and norms, this group challenged the universalism claimed by Eurocentric Modernity, from the perspective of particular cultures and interests.

This snapshot of our debate demonstrates that our arguments were trapped in the dichotomy between Modern/‘us’ and Tradition/‘them’, reproducing the binary between Universality and Particularity. The question of why our debate got stuck in this dichotomy has been an issue for me since looking at this topic more closely. Even though the participants in this discussion see themselves as scientists who do not take any position for granted, we missed the opportunity to question our positions and assumptions. We took the frame of this discussion – European Modernity – for granted, without considering what this dichotomy, which emerged throughout the discussion, had to do with Modernity itself. Nevertheless the frame, as Doreen Massey reminds us, is of eminent importance.

In a conversation with Stuart Hall she points out that even before we speak, before we think, there is this already given frame of reference (see Massey in Hall, 2014). This consideration should make us aware that not only the frame itself, but also how we think and act as researchers requires critical thinking and reflecting. In this contribution I analyze European Modernity within the charged relationship between Universality and Particularity in order to gain ideas for the practical approach of science and research, so that we can change this approach if necessary (see Hall, 1989).

### **Content**

In the first section of this contribution I deal with the question of how European Modernity is constructed. Amongst the

many works about Modernity my ideas focus on feminist and postcolonial approaches in order to bring light to the inherent charged relationship from the perspective from the 'periphery'. Both approaches deal with various forms of oppression in modern societies. Both owe their self-conception to the struggle against oppression and inequality. With their interventions they revealed the main contradiction of Western Modernity, which is granting the equality of all people and their universal rights as humans, and, at the same time denying that. This claim for universal equality creates the necessity to hide the hierarchy of reality and make this appear as rationality.

This contradiction between the claim for equality and the reality of inequality was pointed out by all those excluded from societal participation in their fight for their rights; such as the women's movement or struggles for freedom and independence in colonies. Like Ulrich Beck, I see this dynamic in Western societies as the "return of the excluded", as resistance against hegemonic expansion of European Modernity.

The situation of the excluded (...) reflects back into the center of modernity (...) and not just in the form of violence and loss of civility. It is reflected equally in the disruption or even destruction of the pretensions and foundations of institutions that live on the fiction of overcoming the problem of such enclosed outsiders (Beck, 1997, in Harding, 2008, p. 49)

In a nutshell: the power struggles between the approbation and rejection of modern values and achievements are an essential part of Modernity itself.

The second section picks up on the image that Western knowledge is not a homogenous and monolithic bloc, but deals with a multiplicity of local knowledges. Using feminism and the 'Latin American Modernity/Coloniality research program' as examples for 'enclosed outsiders' I discuss further ideas on knowledge and knowledge production. The question that I focus on is how knowledge production can be freed from the pitfalls of Western rationality and Eurocentric modernity. How can we integrate excluded knowledge without reproducing the hegemonic logic of Universality? How can we name those power relations, which have led to extinction of internal differences

in knowledge systems as well as between knowledge systems? The question is, “who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided” (Lyotard, 1983, p. 9). Here, Lyotard points to the indispensable relation between power and knowledge that plays an important role in the construction of hegemonic knowledge systems.

The third section focuses on science and research more generally and does not refer to education explicitly. In this section I discuss questions concerning possible consequences for science and research, especially for us as scientists and researchers. Francois Jullien’s concept of ‘Distance’/‘the-Space-Between’ should help us to open up a space for critical reflection on our assumptions and on the ‘already given frame of reference’.

### **1. Western Modernity as the dynamic between Universality and Particularity**

As Sandra Harding puts it, Modernity is a discourse of “imaginaries”. It is the idea of progress, of development and of Western rationality. Together they formed the universally valid “substantive feature” – Modernity, which is then disseminated from the West to the non-modern rest of the world (see Harding, 2008). Harding refers to two essential components in the construction of this “substantive feature”, European Modernity. On the one hand there is a basic differentiation between modern/non-modern, on the other hand Modernity’s claim for universality.

Criticizing this concept, Harding points out that the binary construction of modernity is misleading, because the ambivalence, the tension between modern and traditional is not outside, but inside modernity itself. In revealing Modernity’s internalized logic of conflict, she demonstrates that Modernity is not a monolithic bloc, but can be understood as an ongoing conflict-ridden process between different groups, cultures, knowledges and epistemologies (see Harding, 2008). But, as Zerilli points out, Modernity is not seen as struggles between particular identities and cultures, but as an all embracing and epochal struggle between Universality and Particularity. “The notion of peoples without history expresses precisely their incapacity to represent the universal” (Zerilli, 1998, p.10). Scholars like Vandana Shiva demonstrate that Western

knowledge is not universal in an epistemological sense. In her work about the 'monoculture of the mind' (Shiva, 1993) she discusses the dominant western knowledge system as the globalized version of very local traditions. This led to a constant reaffirmation of the West as the center of legitimate knowledge, generally referred to as universal knowledge (see Smith, 2012). But, as Arturo Escobar reminds us, we have to look carefully into Universality to avoid getting confused "between abstract universality and the concrete world hegemony derived from Europe's position as center" (Escobar, 2010, p. 38).

Based on the assumption of the politics of location as keystone of Universality in European thought, Walter Mignolo as well as Judith Butler refer to the role of ideology in constructing Universality. Like Edward Said and James Clifford, Butler concludes that you cannot talk about Universality without talking about Particularity at the same time. Thus, "no universal is freed from its contamination by the particular contexts from which it emerges and in which it travels" (Butler et.al, 2000, p. 40). Whereas Judith Butler considers Universality as the 'key concept' of Modernity, Walter Mignolo sees in Universality the "ideological keystone of historical capitalism" (Mignolo, 2002, p. 80). For him Particularity can also only be discussed together with Universality, although Mignolo stresses the hegemony of Universality. He states that Particularity goes hand in hand with Universality, but Particularity is always in the shadow of Universality, which "justifies local truth with universal values" (Mignolo, 2002, p. 80).

Using the 'metaphor of travel', Edward Said challenges the notion of theory as being stable and located in a fixed place or original context. In contrast to the German Philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who insists that theory is typically driven by an assertive universality, striving to erase all particularities, Said stresses the point that theories are always a response to a specific social and historical situation. He reminds us, that travelling from one place to another is never unimpeded.

This complicates any account of the transplantation, transference, circulation, and commerce of theories and ideas (Said, 1983, p. 226).



In his works “Notes on Travel and Theory” (1989) and “Traveling Cultures” (1997) James Clifford warns against the pitfalls of the travel metaphor in focusing our attention also to class privileges and gender, in order to remind us of the fact that theories and concepts are never neutral or uncontaminated by the context.

Since the sixties and seventies, diverse non-Western and feminist writers have challenged the status of traditional theory, (...) its suppression of location and of its genealogical, storytelling functions (Clifford, 2010, p. 2).

With this idea Clifford changes the perspective on Tradition and Modernity and demonstrates that the West is no longer the only ‘powerful place of knowledge’ (see Clifford 2010). Although the metaphor of the ‘travelling theories’ suggests a universal claim, the historical, political and social contexts challenge this claim. This leads to cracks in the concept of universalism, indicating that western knowledge is not a homogeneous, monolithic bloc. The multiplicity of local knowledges demonstrates clearly that the assumed hegemony of Universality is no longer valid.

## **2. Interventions from the Peripheries**

Picking up on the image that Western Modernity is not a monolithic bloc, but a “local tradition, which has been spread worldwide through intellectual colonization” (Shiva, 1993, n.p.), I concur with the argument that the binary of Universality /Particularity is misplaced. This process is described as globalizing the local through violence by suppressing and removing local knowledge systems from perception and recognition. The local/particular is viewed the ‘Other’ and became formalized through science, philosophy and imperialism into explicit systems of classification, “referred to as ‘universal’ knowledge, available to all and not really ‘owned’ by anyone” (Smith, 2012, p. 66). This perspective prompts the emergence of an epistemically neutral subject who speaks from a privileged site adopting “a universalistic perspective that does away with the significance of geopolitical location” (Maldonado-Torres, 2004, p. 37).

The story of modern knowledge and epistemology remains the story of the Center; alternative knowledges disappear by erasing and destroying reality, which they attempt to represent.

As Vandana Shiva puts it: “dominant scientific knowledge thus breeds a monoculture of the mind by making space for local alternatives disappear” (Shiva, 1993, n.p).

I use feminist studies and ‘The Latin American Modernity/ Coloniality Research program’ as examples to show how the hegemonic logic of Universality was challenged by ‘enclosed outsiders’. Referring to those power struggles that have led to the extinction of internal differences in as well as between knowledge systems, the question of approval and rejection of knowledges is the focus.

### **2.1 Intervention 1: Feminism**

Picking up on Sandra Harding’s notion of the “margins as sites of radical epistemological possibility” and Lyotard’s idea of the indispensable relation between power and knowledge, I use feminist thought and ideas to refer to Modernity’s male supremacy and power. There is an extended body of work by feminist scholars analyzing patriarchy and revealing the hidden gendered structures of modern societies (see Haraway, 1988; Butler, 1991; Lorber and Farrell, 1991; Becker-Schmidt and Knapp, 2000; Harding, 2008). From the standpoint of critical social theory, feminist researchers point out that gender relations in modern society should be seen as a hierarchical form of organizing social relations, and, that the reproduction of patriarchal-hegemonic relations happens via social inclusion and exclusion. These historically grown structures of male supremacy impede equal access to resources, societal and political institutions for women. Despite all the struggles for emancipating the positions of women within Western societies they can still be seen as being “enclosed outsiders”.

This is particularly obvious in the field of science and research, where male-dominated knowledge systems with their claim to Universality are still the norm. Feminist criticism reveals patriarchal hegemonic standards in knowledge production as being androcentric. Contrary to male-dominated knowledge productions Feminist Studies focus on the everyday life of women, considering their experiences as an important new component in knowledge production. Experiences are seen as specific way of knowledge production in which the focus is on how women deal with reality and how they react to it. So in contrast to hegemonic



knowledge productions, feminist theories use the experiences of women as the basis for their epistemologies.

The question of differentiating between subject and object during the cognitive process is the central focal point in feminist criticism of science. Donna Haraway's concept of 'situated knowledges' ascribes an active part to the cognitive subject. In doing so Haraway opposes the dominant perspective that the person in the function of cognition can be seen as a "screen or a ground or a resource", because "that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and his authorship of 'objective' knowledge" (Haraway, 1988, p. 592).

The main point is that the cognitive subject is implicated in the cognitive process. This idea is opposed to that of the detached observer, the neutral seeker of truth and objectivity. This emphasis on activating the subject-object-relation in the cognitive process, which was formally seen as a passive one problematizes the dichotomy without giving up the strategic advantage which comes along with it.

The feminist concept of objectivity follows the notion of a limited and situated knowledge as its basis and therefore rejects the assumed transcendence as well as the classic differentiation between subject and object. Haraway intensifies this criticism of universally acknowledged cognitive rules of cognition by taking the position that the knowing subject as well as the process of generating cognition and knowledge never stops. As a consequence of this humans develop the ability to relate to each other. These relations are a "position of objectivity and partial connectedness", but not a position of identity (Haraway, 1988, p. 586). In this sense she represents the relativism in which differently situated knowledges establish relations, "where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims" (Haraway, 1988, p. 589).

## **2.2 Intervention 2: 'The Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Research Program'**

According to Arturo Escobar, this program reaches back to the 2002 CEISAL Congress, held in Amsterdam. Debating about the increasing importance of 'borders' in constructing political, social and cultural imaginaries in and about Latin America,

scholars of this program drew on the “concept of ‘border thinking’ and ‘border epistemologies’, which they called ‘the modernity / coloniality research program’” (Escobar, 2010, p. 33). Using a ‘looser’ concept of research, Escobar refers in his description of the program to

what seems to be an emergent but already significantly cohesive perspective that is fueling a series of researches, meetings, publications, and so forth around a shared – (...) – set of concepts. (...) I would argue that this body of work, still relatively unknown in the English speaking world for reasons that go beyond language and that speak to the heart of the program, constitutes a novel perspective from Latin America but not only for Latin America but for the world of the social and human sciences as a whole. (Escobar, 2010, p. 33)

Based on liberation philosophy, autonomous social science and dependency theory scholars like Walter Mignolo, Ramon Grosfoguel or Anibal Quijano challenged Eurocentric Modernity from what they called the ‘exteriority’ (see Escobar, 2013). Against mainstream theories on modernity, this group locates the origins of modernity in the “Conquest of America and the control of the Atlantic after 1942” rather than in European Enlightenment (Escobar, 2010, p. 38). Referring to the ‘significance of geopolitical location’ they share the assumption that Modernity is a European phenomenon, which can only exist because of coloniality. It is

the need to take seriously the epistemic force of local histories and to think theory through from the political praxis of subaltern groups (Escobar, 2010, p. 39).

What consequences are we facing if we take the epistemic force of local histories seriously? And what consequences we are dealing with if we think the epistemic force through the political practice of subaltern groups? Similar to feminist interventions, the postcolonial approach also points out that the epistemic designs emerged as responses to the propagation of an epistemology that was assumed to have universal value across time and space (see Mignolo, 2012). They are hiding and concealing itself as being beyond a particular point of view.

Therefore these systems were “able to construct a hierarchy of superior and inferior knowledge and, thus, of superior and inferior people around the world” (Grosfoguel, 2011, p. 6). This alleged neutrality and universality produces epistemic blindness.

At the end, such belief in neutrality, I would like to suggest, tends to reproduce blindness, not in regard to space as such, but in relation to non-European ways of thinking and to production and reproduction of the imperial/colonial relation, or what I would like to refer to, (...) as coloniality. (Maldonado-Torres, 2004, p. 30)

Introducing the notion ‘coloniality’, Maldonado-Torres refuses to be monopolized by aspects of binary logic on the one hand as well as by hegemony on the other. But how can this claim of the ‘Other’ become a challenge for the hegemonic knowledge system, without eliminating the already mentioned tension between assimilation and dissimulation of knowledge? Which consequences will it have for the universal and hegemonic claim of Modernity if hegemonic knowledge can be seen as only a particular knowledge? Based on the assumption that every critique of Modernity, which does not take the perspective of ‘exteriority’ leads to the reproduction of Eurocentric perspectives, Arturo Escobar states that

it is impossible to think about transcending or overcoming modernity without approaching it from the perspective of the colonial difference (Escobar, 2013, p. 40).

In revealing this suppressed counter-discourse as ‘negation of the Other’, Enrique Dussel invents the project of ‘trans-modernity’ for overcoming Modernity by including the knowledges of the “enclosed outsiders” as the excluded others (see Dussel, 2012). Walter Mignolo’s use of the notions of “border thinking” and “border epistemology” (Mignolo, 2012) pick up on the idea of the “enclosed outsiders” and refers to the diversity of historical processes to focus on pluriversalism, emerging from “border thinking” (see Mignolo, 2013). With his concept of ‘border thinking’ Walter Mignolo wants us to critically reassess and amend the categories of hegemonic epistemologies.

Border thinking points towards a different kind of hegemony, a multiple one. As a universal project, diversity allows us to imagine alternatives to universalism (...). 'Interdependence' may be the word that summarizes the break away from the idea of totality and brings about the idea of networks whose articulation will require epistemological principles I called in this book 'border thinking' and 'border gnosis', as a re-articulation of the colonial difference: 'diversality as a universal project', which means that people and communities have the right to be different precisely because 'we' are all equals. (Mignolo, 2010, p. 310/311)

This shows that Mignolo does not deal with the replacement of epistemologies but proclaims the co-existence of diverse knowledges. If we accept pluriversality of knowledges we have to step back from taken-for-granted assumptions and ask, how these knowledges could become

a genuinely dialogic and dialectical history that can account for the formation of different selves and the construction of different epistemologies (Sangars in Ashcroft et.al, 1995, p. 166).

With the claim for a space for an epistemology "that comes from the border and aims toward political and ethical transformation", Walter Mignolo focuses on the dialogue between a Western discourse of Modernity and the critique based on 'colonial difference' and 'border thinking'. With this concept Mignolo could also show, that hegemony can be displaced by multiple knowledges. This allows us, to imagine alternatives to Universality, which are not viewed as Particularity, but as multiplicity (see Mignolo, 200).

Summarizing the main points, we can see that universal Eurocentric knowledge attributes value and truth only to the Western way of knowledge production and disregards other epistemic traditions. This hegemonic notion of knowledge generates not only a certain scientific practice and culture, but sets up frames for interpretations that actively suppress anything that is articulated outside the hegemonic frame of knowledge production. This means those knowledges and cultures which

represented the peripheries of modernity, like Feminism and Postcolonialism, became visible only through power struggles against universal knowledge claims. This way of generating knowledge opposes the corrective 'top-down knowledge' and looks for the hidden and unknown, leading us to a concept of an imaginary which asserts its claim for a different view on the world. This concept of an alternative imaginary focuses on hidden and suppressed knowledges which are declared as non-existent or as non-valuable by hegemonic knowledge systems.

As we can see, this reference to the hidden, to what has been thought of as non-existent, shakes up the foundations of the universal/monopolistic knowledge. As we can see there is an epistemic failure of totalizing in the modernity discourse, because there is no singular truth in knowledge production. Instead, as Judith Butler points out, we have to talk about "multiple significations" (Laclau, 2000) addressing plural universalities, which compete with each other. The linearity of dominant knowledge becomes fragmented, local knowledge slips through the emerging cracks of fragmentation (see Butler, 2000). The German philosopher Hans-Jörg Rheinberger demonstrates that modern knowledge acquisition is based on flexible devolution and that modern sciences create something like 'local rationalism'.

An epistemology which wants to capture scientific thinking in its actual dynamic has to consider itself as vivid, mobile, fluid and willing to take a risk just like scientific thinking and acting itself. This scientific thinking and acting in turn tries to understand the epistemology (Rheinberger, 2015, p. 31).

This shows an essential similarity of the two approaches. Feminist as well as postcolonial criticism disrupt the tendencies of "generalization of western forms of knowledges" with their theoretical interventions (see Harrasser in Deuber-Mankowsky, 2013). As I already pointed out, the attitude underlying how to gain knowledge is of utmost importance for the scientist. There is a big difference if the epistemological interest rests on a universal claim to truth, or if this interest differs from this universal claim. This goes along with the question of whether the desire for knowledge is characterized by abstraction, objectivity and neutrality, or by multiperspectivity, interest

and partisanship. Challenging the neutral, disembodied and codified scientific 'objectivity' from perspectives of the periphery gives way to the concept of "positioning" and "border thinking", which is then seen as key practice in underlying knowledges.

**Concluding remarks: Reflections on involvement and on 'the-Space-Between'**

My discussion of hegemonic knowledge systems has attempted to open "a space of a different kind for polemics about the epistemological priority of the experience of various groups or collectivities (...)" (Jameson, 1988, in Harding, 2008, p. 119). The concept of 'Distance'/'the-Space-Between' as proposed by French philosopher and Sinologist Francois Jullien helps us to look at the theories discussed here from a different perspective, because it opens up a space for critical reflection. According to Enrique Dussel knowledge can only be thought of as universal if it is by definition pluriversal, indicating openness for dialogue among different epistemic traditions (see Dussel, 2012).

To create what Achille Mbembe (2015) describes as "the capacity to make systematic forays beyond our current knowledge horizons", we need a space which is not polluted by one or the other side. In the tradition of 'border thinking', Jullien also focus on the way out of simple universalism and bad relativism. In his works on the relations between European and Chinese culture, Jullien is against the domestication of difference because such an absorption a priori excludes the unexpected, the surprising or the unsettling. Instead of difference he suggests the concept of Distance, which has a power to create different ways of thinking and knowing.

The Distance is not a concept of categorizing, but one of interference and confusion and therefore does not produce identity but something what I would describe as a 'prolific field' (Jullien, 2014, p. 35).

This 'prolific field' provides the space that is not characterized by the dichotomy of assimilation and dissimulation of knowledges. In this 'prolific field' it is possible to generally rearticulate Western Eurocentric thinking and knowing because the Particular and Universal can still be looked at as something mutual. The 'need both to accept and to refuse' difference as a condition of inclusion in the universal shows clearly that there is no possibility to dissolve the universal claim from the particular (see Butler, 2000).



In acknowledging the refusal and acceptance of difference, 'the-Space-Between' allows us not to focus on difference but on the enunciation of a space for critical reflection.

The logic of discovering is seen as disturbance and confusion, and challenges the binary logic of Modernity. The concept of 'the-Space-Between' opens up a reflexive space, "where one discovers him/herself in the views of the Other" (Jullien, 2014, p. 33). The alienation of one's own thinking is of importance insofar as it produces 'Distance' to one's own knowledge and as well as to one's taken-for-granted assumptions. "The-Space-Between" gained from this alienation enables not only the reflection of the given frame but also the rootedness of one's own perspectives in structure. Thus one's own positioning can be questioned, extended and changed.

This leads to a diversity of discursive practices which de Sousa Santos sees as an opening of the canon of knowledge (see de Sousa Santos et. al., 2008). But this does not mean a type of relativism in the sense of equality of all positions. On the contrary inequalities can only be recognized by producing 'Distance', which questions the taken-for-granted political and societal order and the dominant discourse about this order. In this context de Sousa Santos talks about an

invitation to the promotion of non-relativistic dialogues among knowledges, granting "equal opportunities" to the different kinds of knowledge engaged in ever broader epistemological disputes aimed both at maximizing their respective contributions to build a more democratic and just society and at decolonizing knowledge and power (de Sousa Santos et.al., 2008, Introduction, p. xx)

Based on that I see feminist and postcolonial interventions not only as critical reflections of the self in the mirror of the 'Other' (see Haraway, 1988), but also as an uncovering of power relations in generating knowledge. In addition, the concept of 'Distance'/'The-Space-Between' enables us to see the irritations, perplexities or imponderabilia as source for new knowledge and thinking. The concept of space as developed by Jullien opens up to epistemic diversity and pluriversality. But, as Achille Mbembe reminds us, this

is a process that does not necessarily abandon the notion of universal knowledge for humanity, but which embraces it via a horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among different epistemic traditions (Mbembe, 2015, n.p).

As Mbembe goes on, however, this understanding of knowledge and knowledge production needs the decolonization of universities “with the aim of creating a less provincial and more open radical cosmopolitan pluriversalism – a task that involves the radical re-founding of our ways of thinking and a transcendence of our disciplinary divisions (Mbembe, 2015, n.p). If we consider Mbembe’s claim as important, we cannot lose sight of the economic and institutional aspect of knowledge production in higher education. We cannot pretend to decolonize knowledge and knowledge production without decolonizing the university itself.

As universities are transformed into global players in the global market economy, this request for systematic critique is difficult. When universities become systems of authoritative control and standardization, decolonization of knowledge and knowledge production is not an easy task (see Robertson, 2005, Andreotti, 2015, Mbembe, 2015). But, as I tried to show, there is also strong counter-discourse, criticizing the neoliberal paradigm from the perspective of the peripheries in order to overcome hegemonic universalism and to provide an imaginary on knowledge production which “is truly about radical sharing and universal inclusion” (Mbembe, 2015, n.p).

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